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AUTHOR McKenzie, Gary R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper places the rise and decline of the progressive movement in education in the context of shifts in determinist-humanist philosophies, popular conceptions of social needs and demands of education, and genetic-cognitive trends in psychology. The following six theses are advanced to explain the rise and decline of the progressive curriculum and to suggest ways it can be adapted to restore relevance and credibility to the discourse that governs schools: (1) enlightenment humanists founded U.S. democracy and public education on a belief in free will, reason, the capacity to learn from others, and a disposition or duty to govern themselves wisely according to personally chosen principles; (2) turn of the century Progressives marginalized these humanist assumptions by synthesizing determinist philosophy, social Darwinist pseudo-science, and public demands for social engineering; (3) World War II caused paradigm shifts in American philosophy, popular priorities, and psychological theories; (4) subsequent curriculum theorists like Tyler included ideas of discipline and learning theory to meet rising demands for information and to fill the vacuum of heuristic ideas in the child centered curriculum of G. Hall and his followers; (5) progressives rejected many of the ideas of academics and cognitive psychologists and stagnated in the child-centered and individual-activity focus of the Great Society programs; and (6) curriculum theory may regain credibility and influence by synthesizing and applying cognate fields of disciplines and psychology. The curriculum field built by master planners before World War II did not adapt to postwar social demands, but the principle of building curriculum on a synthesis of different foundation fields is still a useful model for curriculum reform. (Contains 39 references.) (SLD)

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Running Head: Understanding Curriculum

Understanding Curriculum Better: Rise and Fall Progressive Curriculum and A Humanist Alternative

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego April, 1998

Gary R. McKenzie
University of Texas
Austin, Texas

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Problem

Like psychology, curriculum was more or less a minor branch of philosophy from the time of Socrates until the scientific education movement in the late 19 Th. century. Herbert Kliebard (1987) says The Struggle for the Curriculum erupted when Humanist Eliot and the Committee of Ten proposed an equal curriculum for all students in English, math, geography, history and foreign language, and child centered progressive Hall argued that most students were not intelligent enough to benefit from it. Hall persuaded the National Education Association to his scientific and practical side, and the child centered progressives transformed American schools due to their good intentions and skillful alignment of curriculum goals with the political zeitgeist, the social demands and scientific theories of the progressive era. (Cremin, 1961. Krug, 1972; Kliebard 1987). However the influence of theory in school curriculum declined when World War II changed progressive American government, social needs and psychology, and curriculum failed to adapt. Now curriculum theory is largely ignored as vaguely grounded opinions of a moribund (Schwab, 1971) and stagnant (Smeltzer, 1980) discourse. "Pure theorists" like Pinar (Pinar et al, 1995) propose to narrow the discourse even further by purging outside influences like political demands, subject disciplines, and modern psychology.

There is little reason for universities or taxpayers to attend to or support curriculum as a "pure" discourse without popular and scientifically credible applications to schooling. Rather than try to mariginalize the mainstream discourse, curriculum specialists should build a new less arrogant and divisive synthesis with political, social

and scientific credibility that policy makers can vote for with confidence, and that administrators, teachers and parents can support as an honorable, common direction.

The purposes of this paper are place the rise and decline of the progressive movement in the larger context of shifts in determinist-humanist philosophies, in popular conceptions of social needs and demands of education, and the genetic- cognitive trends in psychology that characterize different periods of American history. This context will correct certain omissions and errors in Pinar's understanding of curriculum, and the more complete picture will suggest ways curriculum specialists can adapt, with integrity, to restore some of former political, social and theoretical appeal to curriculum recommendations at the beginning of the 21 St. century.

Perspective

The authors' perspective has strong roots in enlightenment humanism and cognitive learning but it is certainly not "pure"; it is eclectic, practical and pragmatic, and synthetic as a consequence of unusually varied training and experience not only in curriculum, but also in psychology and educational politics in two notorious slum districts and one of the most reputable urban districts in the U.S. I will apply multiple perspectives on complex curriculum issues.

My experience and reading leads me to believe that the early progressives gained influence and transformed schools because they developed a highly specialized, indeed a custom- made synthesis of turn of the century political and social trends and wrapped it in the then popular trappings of Darwinist science, and then formed organizations that lobbied the synthesis into the granite of overly prescriptive law and policy. The culture changed in World War II, but curriculum and

teaching returned to life adjustment during the McCarthy era and failed the cognitive movement in the 1960s. Schools returned to a "moribund" child centered paradigm (Schwab, 1971) in the Great Society, curriculum split into child centered development and a decision making form of social reconstruction. I believe six main theses describe this changing historical context, help to explain the rise and decline of the progressive curriculum, and suggest ways curriculum can adapt, as the progressives did in a different era, to restore relevance and credibility in the mainstream discourse that governs schools.

Six Theses

1. Enlightenment humanists founded our democracy and public education on the belief that all people have free will, reason, capacity to learn great ideas from others and a disposition or duty to govern themselves wisely according to personally chosen principles.

There have been opposite philosophies of man and education since Moses and Socrates or Aristotle. The determinist philosophy of Socrates held that people were born with dramatically different fate or natures (the metaphor of bronze, iron and gold) which predetermined what they could learn and become, and required different tracks for different social classes. The alternate philosophy shared by most religions and humanists, including Jefferson, assumes people are born equal in the sense of having free will, reason, the capacity to learn great ideas from instruction and, thus, the potential to perfect and govern themselves. Jefferson admitted his ideal had not been realized, but he believed people would rise to the challenge if public education, with math, science and humanities was available to all. The Three fifths compromise, and slave codes demonstrate that Americans were divided about Jefferson's "self evident truth"; but the Civil War, the Fourteenth.,

Fifteenth., Sixteenth and Twenty- first. Amendments, Reconstruction, Supreme court decisions and civil rights acts demonstrate that humanist ideals are still important in basic American philosophy and law.

2. Turn of the century Progressives mariginalized humanist assumptions by synthesizing determinist philosophy, social Darwinist pseudo science and public demands for social engineering.

Cremin's, (1961) Krug's (1972) and Kliebard's (1987) histories attribute the transformation of the school from its egalitarian humanist roots to child centered, citizen molding progressivism to a combination of four factors, including scientific education and child study of G.S. Hall who became the "undisputed leader" of the child centered progressives by defeating Eliot and the Committee of Ten in 1893 (Kliebard, 1987)

First, the progressive zeitgeist among intellectuals, influenced by new social sciences and Marxism promised governments could scientifically plan, manage and thus improve societies. This turn of the century notion of planned societies was a form of technocracy more like Socrates' notion of government by benevolent philosopher kings than like Jefferson's faith that all citizens could govern themselves.

Second in popular politics, liberals were outraged by conditions exposed by muckrakers in the Octopus and The Jungle, conservatives were worried that immigration, strikes and European revolutions might subvert the culture. Business interests wanted to a trained work force and labor wanted children out of factories. All agreed schools should change to meliorate the lives of immigrants and the underclass and develop or inculturate them to conform as good citizens for turn of the century society.

Third, poorly educated, isolationist and ethnocentric, low tech Americans had little interest in academic or college prep education

before World War II. Balanced meals, flush toilets, contour plowing and Gasoline engines where cutting edge technology, and simple enough to be learned by modeling and example. Practical knowledge and common sense was enough to create low tech airplanes and the early electronics industry.

Fourth, and most misunderstood, the scientific education movement, especially the American child study movement from which the new curriculum was built, was dominated by the genetic stage theories of Darwin, Baldwin and G.S. Hall (Kliebard, 1987; Parke et al, 1995). All were genetic determinist theories that assumed children's minds literally evolved through the same stages of mental ability as the child's race, that young children and the lower classes could not learn, understand or reason with ideas and had to recapitulate ancestral activities to learn as simians and savages learned at exercize the mind and to evolve to a higher stage (Parke et al, 1994). Those theories implied changing curriculum to fit the hypothesized mental stage limits, withhold abstract ideas from children and "adolescent races", and substitute instinctive activities to naturally develop bodies, essential roles, skills and conformist attitudes, and evolve minds as the child's genes dictated (Hall, 1905; Hunt, 1961; Parke et al, 1994.)

All these factors aligned to discredit the "self evident" truths of humanism and shift beliefs to the progressive paradigm. Administrators and teachers in the progressive National Education Association voted with Hall to oppose Eliot in 1893, and Harris's Report of the Committee of Fifteen. The factors supported substituting citizen development (inculturation) social studies for a history and geography of ideas in 1917 and justified the N.E.A.'s declaration on principles of curriculum in 1918, which stressed fitting a practical curriculum to

individual differences. Kliebard, 1917). Organizations like the "Progressive Education Association" formed to advance the progressive paradigm and functioned as lobbies to persuade other educators and legislators to restructure schools into age-stage grades, revise curriculum to more closely fit readiness theories. In the 1920s, Legislators restructured schools and curriculum by policy into age grades and ability tracks, and mandated that teachers must learn "developmental theory" to be certified. Those laws practically prescribed teaching Hall's then -dominant genetic stage theory since the Herbartians had ceased to meet and most assumed Piaget's work replicated Hall's without bothering to read the French. (Griffiths, 1998). The result was a set of assumptions, propositions and practices- a paradigm based on the principle that genetics determines ability that was mandated by law and considered best practice in schools.

3. World War II caused paradigm shifts in American intellectual philosophy, popular priorities and psychological theory. All four factors that justified the child centered ability- based curriculum changed during the war. First, American war propaganda showed Nazi, Fascist, (and later Communist) schools molding children, and contrasted that image with the (Jeffersonian) idea that the rising generation should learn freely and use a variety of great ideas to understand issues, form personal opinions, and govern themselves. Racial and social class distinctions were discouraged as divisive, unpatriotic and unpopular in public discourse and reduced in military service. Curriculum that planned, tracked and adjusted the lives of children in public schools, while withholding heuristic ideas, became politically incorrect and remained unpopular after the war (Scheidel and McKenzie, 1965).

Second, the war raised the value of heuristic knowledge of math, sciences, history, geography and languages in the national mind. War time parents recognized importance in math and science, histories of government and foreign geography, foreign language and burgeoning technology. Thus GI Bills and Rosie Riveters resolved their children would go to college and learn powerful ideas that would improve their future, and not let governments elites plan for them (Scheidel and McKenzie, 1965). After the war, there was a great surge in demand for and enrollment in colleges that has grown and spread across races and social classes. Now as much as 90% of high school seniors say that want to attend college, and 70% actually do.

Third, war demands for quick effective training of large heterogeneous populations in complex non instinctive military, technical and industrial tasks exposed the impracticality of using genetic aptitude and self paced development by activities or discovery on which child centered education was based as a paradigm for training. It was not practical to give a squad of recruits a hand grenade or an airplane to manipulate to learn by discovery. Learning researchers like Ausubel, Bruner, and Gagne' rejected stage development as well as trial and error behaviorism, and created cognitive theories of learning and thought (Gredler, 1997) and became the most important theorists in learning psychology from the 1960s to the 1980s (Gordon, et al, 1984). Vygotsky's (1963) and social cognitive development, and cognitive learning, information processing and schema theories replaced determinist developmental stage theories and experimentally demonstrated that humans can indeed learn ideas, and the learned ideas would make them free to learn more, think and solve problems rationally.

The new cognitive psychology allows planners to task analyze complex abilities to pinpoint component information, ideas and skills, and then teach the ideas by relatively clear and efficient direct instruction (Gagne' 1985; Brophy and Good, 1986), more like Vygotsky (1963) proposed than like Hall or Kilpatrick or even Piaget supposed from the developmental stage perspective. By 1982, Divesta's archival review of "Cognitive Development" research showed stage theories seriously underestimated children's abilities to learn from instruction. By 1994, developmental psychologists showed little interest in "strong" forms of stage theory (Parke, et al, 1994) like Halls' determinism or similar prescriptive applications of Piaget from which the progressive child centered curriculum derived much of its scientific plausibility.

4. Tyler and other curriculum theorists of his time included basic ideas of disciplines and learning theory in curriculum foundations to meet rising demands for information and to fill the vacuum of heuristic ideas in the child centered curriculum of Hall and his followers.

Kliebard (1987) classifies Dewey as a humanist and says he was dismissed as unscientific because he believed children could learn ideas and think, and opposed Hall's dominant position as denying equal opportunity. The specific changes Tyler recommended in the progressive curriculum paradigm went a step farther to broaden "sources of curriculum" from prewar child development and social critic/reform visions, to include the disciplines sciences, humanities, and learning theory. That addition was necessary, given changes in technology, social aspirations and new cognitive theories that account for a wider range of learning than children, especially slum children, can get from direct experience. Tyler's work enabled a more balanced, more equal, and more appropriate curriculum for the idea oriented

information age. Contemporaries like Morrisett, Taba and Michaelis saw the "rationale" as necessary to adjust curriculum to political, technical and social conditions after Sputnik. Schwab (1964) and others helped lead the humanist curriculum movement toward a more heuristic curriculum that combined formal concepts and models from disciplines with static or fluid methods of inquiry.

The notion of a curriculum that integrated powerful ideas into working models or structures children could learn and use as tools was supposed to empower all students to learn and understand issues, comprehend expert or technical opinions, and form decisions for themselves, as Jefferson's humanist ideal proposed. It was not based on belief in the kind of mental discipline Hall criticized in 1893 (Bruner, 1960; Schwab, 1964). It was less racist, more intellectual, more egalitarian, more democratic, and more open ended in allowing opportunity and choice to all citizens in education and social policy than any of the progressive approaches to shaping or developing citizens to particular meliorist, efficiency or reconstruction goals chosen for them by progressives Pinar calls "master planners."

Progressives rejected "external" ideas in Tyler's rationale, especially those of academics and cognitive psychologists that supported teaching ideas, and thus stagnated in the child centered- individual activity- developmental focus of Great Society programs.

Child centered progressives in public schools and in school oriented curriculum and teacher education faculties misunderstood or ignored the shifts in social demand and learning theory. School based educators ignored the Hunt (1961) interpretation of Piaget as allowing acceleration, and used Piaget's cognitive stages as their forebearers had used Hall's more rigid genetic stages to suppose that young and poor

children could not learn ideas they did not naturally know, and had to acquire speech, reading and writing, social skills and conformist attitudes through developmental activities (McCartin, 1969; Dueck, 1972, Texas State Board of Education, 1994). Practically, those applications differ little from those Hall and Bobbitt proposed.

In social studies there was a neo Reconstructionist effort reform society by engaging children K-12 in grappling with and attempting to resolve problems of the magnitude or conflict, racism, economic injustice or environmental imbalance with no clear provision for first teaching information and ideas for use as cognitive tools (Manson, et al, 1970). Later this movement grew to criticize old institutions and model new (Marxist, feminist or multicultural) roles, attitudes and norms in the critical theory or post modern reform curriculum philosophies of the 1970, 1980s and 1990s (Pinar et al, 1995), essentially as Counts proposed in 1932.

For example, Pinar et al (1995) says that curriculum people dismissed teaching concepts from the disciplines as the same kind of "mental discipline" Hall perceived and used in attacking humanists like Eliot in the nineteenth century. Similarly, Pinar seems to attribute pre war behaviorist conceptions to postwar psychologists when he labels Gagne' a behaviorist like those who failed to compete with Hall. Gagne' is, of course, honored by psychologists as one of the inventors of cognitive information processing theory, and an architect of the field of instructional design (Gredler, 1997). No one who understands either behaviorist or cognitive psychology could make a mistake like that.

Pinar, like the block of curriculum philosophers who call themselves "pure theorists", explicitly says psychology is irrelevant in curriculum and goes on to propose that curriculum discourse would

improve if it excluded outside influences from psychology and the disciplines. To use a Darwinist metaphor, the proposal to turn curriculum discourse inward to a select group is the intellectual equivalent of inbreeding. It prevents change and retards adaptation to a changing environment, is a key mechanism in the process that causes species of animals to decline from "vanishing" to extinct status. Censoring "impure" ideas out of a discussion has precedent, of course, in the poisoning of Socrates, Crucifying Christians, silencing Galileo, burning heritics, mariginalizing John Dewey, or the Red Guard attacks on Chinese intellectuals.

The decline of elementary social studies, probably the sin qua non of progressive education, provides an especially clear and concrete example of a series of decisions which reflect this failure to adapt, the consequences of stagnation and loss of influence of curriculum specialists. Elementary social studies was created in 1917 to replace humanist history and geography and develop good citizens (especially of immigrants and the lower classes through developmental activities at the height of Hall's influence and corresponded to Hall expectations and meliorist goals. Of course trends in social studies literature evolved from meliorism through social efficiency to Counts' social reconstruction, and then briefly swung toward humanism in World War II. After the war (During the McCarthy era) The National Council for the Social Studies guidelines returned to child centered "life adjustment" curriculum to socialize children into good citizens in the 1950s. During the 1960s, some leaders in social studies, like Morrisett, Michaelis, Taba, and Senesh, supported the cognitive shift to teach social science concepts. Their efforts were resisted in schools and by developmentalists who thought children could not learn ideas, and

social reformers in the National Council for Social Studies who opposed structures of disciplines (Tucker, 1969) as Pinar (1995) correctly explains. The 1969 national council for social studies year book returned exclusively to apply developmental stage theory to curriculum. In 1970, the Council adopted the social criticism approach to social reconstruction Pinar describes (Manson, et al, 1970; Pinar, 1995). Parents in the back to basics movement supported subjects and opposed developmental open classroom with their activities learning centers and social therapies in the 1970s. Roselle, (1975) called on teachers to tell parents they were wrong but teachers apparently agreed with parents. The 1979 University Faculty Assembly general session at the National Council for Social Studies recognized no one was interested in opinions of social studies theorists. (Tucker, 1979).

At the beginning of the political reforms of education in 1980, a curriculum study commission in Texas (Curriculum Study Commission, 1980) and recommended deleting primary social studies from curriculum and four bills were introduced into the legislature to enable the State Board of education to do so, along with other archaic subjects. The curriculum change issue was hotly debated in state P.T.A. convention caucuses. Generally, parents agreed that poor primary grade children need to learn information, images and ideas about people, places and events beyond their experience in order to construct meaning in what they read, and that parents of literate children would move to private schools if the curriculum was dumbed down; on the other hand parents were opposed to social studies if it meant busywork or social adjustment, or at least felt spending a second hour on reading would be more beneficial. The legislature did restore social studies to the official curriculum.

Of course in the 1980s, the Commission on Excellence (1983), The National Endowment for the Humanities (1986), Secretary Bennett (1986),. Hirsch (1987), and undersecretary Ravitch and Finn (1987) all called for more emphasis on teaching history and geography, but social studies progressives only attacked those proposals as content oriented. Without coherent support or clear popular goals, elementary social studies could compete for limited class time. Legislatures all over the nation adopted minimum literacy tests that excluded social studies questions as measures of excellence; schools "integrated" and language arts activities into social studies time almost vanished in a flood of whole language activities (Atwood, 1986; McKenzie, 1998).

Curriculum theory may regain credibility and influence by attending to synthesizing and applying cognate fields of disciplines and psychology.

The master planners built a credible and influential curriculum field by synthesizing the determinist philosophy and popular demands into a coherent framework, and supporting their prescriptions with scientific theory and research (Kliebard, 1987). Their particular synthesis was wildly successful in transforming schools before World War II; but curriculum failed to adapt as postwar social demands changed, became fragmented and polarized in lobby- driven ideological politics. However the principle of building curriculum on a synthesis or alignment of different "foundation" fields of philosophy, science, and popular demand was, and may still be persuasive and a useful model for curriculum reform.

The democratic form of Constructivism, positive forms of social criticism, and intellectuals' hope that honestly educated people can think for themselves are incompatible with master planner

manipulation of child development and far more compatible with a return to enlightenment humanism in curriculum.

Turn of the century paternalistic pity for or ethnocentric fear of the underclass has been at least partly replaced by popular demands for equal opportunity, mainstreaming, social mobility, aspirations to enable poor and minority students to attend college and even affirmative action to give people a chance to learn. If there is a fear today, it is more accurately expressed in A Nation At Risk (Commission on Excellence, 1983) that unless all Americans become better educated in heuristic ideas, especially math and science needed in economics and the social sciences, and humanities needed in thoughtful and ethical self government, the nation will cease to prosper economically and be pulled apart socially.

Curriculum need not be limited to structure of disciplines to deal with great ideas, but it will remain incredible and unacceptable to educated parents and university scholars as long as curriculum specialists denigrate and oppose inclusion of those ideas in an equal curriculum. The turn of the century contempt for college education as an elitist playground for idle rich males, or as a repository of impractical theory has been replaced by a recognition that advanced knowledge is essential for life in a high tech international world. There is a high demand for education that leads to opportunity to attend and succeed in college among parents and high school seniors, and is agreed upon by business leaders and policy makers. Affirmative action is a sham, and multicultural education will be counter productive unless students are ultimately given access to the set of heuristic ideas actually used in government, law, humanities sciences and social sciences.

The turn of the century assumption that genetics, race, or developmental stages determines intelligence, readiness, interests learning style that justified the individualized developmental activities curriculum has been replaced by cognitive theories that attribute comprehension and problem solving to learned knowledge and learned strategies. Learning theorists are now in substantial agreement that problem solving is largely learned as students learn information, precedents, concepts and principles, or complex working models of reality ... and also learn a variety of more or less teachable study, learning, or problem solving strategies with which to manage those ideas. (Bruner, 1960; Vygotsky, 1963; Gagne' 1980; Parke et al, 1994). That is essentially what Jefferson assumed two hundred years ago and very good news for modern Americans who hope all citizens, including the poor, can learn and succeed more equally in the twenty first century.

There is a basis here for a new synthesis. By putting new ideas from different fields together under a framework of at least partly verified theory rather than declaring them heresies, we can build a popular, heuristic curriculum that policy makers will be relieved to support, that parents of all kinds will demand for their own children,

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